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UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
EDUCATION

[Fraser, Alexander Campbell]

1. Biographical Notice of J. S. Mill. By Professor Fraser.

John Stuart Mill was born in London on the 20th of May 1806, and died at Avignon on the 8th of May 1873. He was of Scotch descent. He was connected with Edinburgh not only as having been an honorary member of this Society, but because his father, James Mill, the historian of British India, and author of the "Analysis of the Human Mind," received his academical education here. His grandfather was a small farmer, at Northwater Bridge, in the county of Angus, of whom I find nothing more recorded. The father, by his extraordinary intellectual promise when a boy, drew the attention of Sir John Stuart, then member for Kincardineshire, by whom he was sent to the University of Edinburgh, at the expense of a fund, established by Lady Jane Stuart and some other ladies, for educating young men for the Church of Scotland. Towards the end of last century, James Mill attended the classes in Arts and Divinity. He was a pupil of Dalziel, the Professor of Greek, whose prelections he attended, I believe, for three sessions, and his philosophical powers were called forth by Dugald Stewart's

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lectures in Moral Philosophy. I do not know by what Presbytery he was licensed to preach, but I have heard Sir David Brewster say that he had listened to one of his sermons. When a student at the University it seems that he was given to reading books of a sceptical tendency in religion. He soon found the ministry uncongenial to him, having satisfied himself that he could not believe the doctrines of any Christian Church.

About the year 1800 James Mill removed to London, where for nearly twenty years he made his living by his pen. He was a man of singular force of character and subtlety of intellect—a stern Scotch Stoic or Cynic, with an Epicurean creed. He married soon after he settled in the metropolis, with only the precarious income of a literary adventurer. The eldest son of his large family was John Stuart Mill. He was born about the time the “History of India” was begun. In the twelve following years the extraordinary energy of the father was chiefly given to this great work, and to the instruction of his eldest son.

That eldest son has himself described in his “Autobiography” some of the original influences by which his own mind and character were formed. The stern paternal schoolmaster was one of the most important. The story of young Mill’s early instruction is as extraordinary as any in the records of English training. Books in Greek, Latin, and English; in history, logic, and analytical psychology, were among the means—the end being the production of as perfect a reasoning machine as could be produced out of the boy. What is commonly included in the higher education began with him in childhood. He was introduced to Greek when he was three years of age. Before he was eight he had read many Greek books, including the *Theætetus* of Plato. He had also read a great deal of history, including Hume and Gibbon, and had discussed what he had read with his father, in their rural walks about Newington Green, where the Mills were living from 1810 to the end of 1813. In the winter of 1813 they moved into a house, rented from their friend Jeremy Bentham, in Queen Square, Westminster. About the time this change was made young Mill began to learn Latin. Before he was twelve he had read most of the Latin and Greek poets, historians, and orators, much of the Rhetoric of Aristotle, and a great deal of ancient history. At twelve his philosophical

education began. He studied logic in the Organon, in Latin treatises of scholastic logic, and in Hobbes. His later experience made him set great value on this early familiarity with Aristotelian logic. The first intellectual operation in which he arrived at proficiency was dissecting bad arguments, and finding in what the fallacy lay. Ricardo and a course of political economy followed; also much study of Plato. The high expectations his stern and exacting preceptor had of him at this time appear in a letter from James Mill to Jeremy Bentham in 1812.

In May 1820 he was sent to France. His father had in the year before been appointed one of the Assistants of the Examiner of Correspondence in the India House. Abroad the boy lived in the family of Sir Samuel Bentham, a brother of Jeremy. He was introduced to M. Say, the political economist, and other French *savans* in Paris. This was the beginning of the intimate sympathy with the literary and political society of France, which was always characteristic of John Mill.

In July 1821 he returned to England. He resumed his old studies, with the addition of some new ones. He read Condillac "as much for warning as example." In the winter of 1821-22, he studied jurisprudence under John Austin, and also in the writings of his father's friend, Jeremy Bentham. His whole previous education had been in a certain sense a course of Benthamism, for he had been always taught to apply Bentham's standard of "the greatest happiness." He lived much in Bentham's society, and often accompanied him and his father in their walks together, at Newington Green and afterwards in Westminster, besides making long summer visits to him at Ford Abbey, in Devonshire. Before he was fifteen, his studies were carried into analytic psychology, still under his father's direction. He read Locke, Berkeley, Helvetius, Hartley, Hume, Reid, Stewart, and Brown on "Cause and Effect." The elder Mill about this time began to write his "Analysis of the Human Mind," which was published seven years later, in 1829, and the son was allowed to read the manuscript, portion by portion, as it advanced.

This training, while it produced an astonishing precocity of logical intelligence, was not equally favourable to physical vigour, and practical skill or sagacity. Mr Mill tells us that as he had

no boy companions, and the animal need of physical action was satisfied by walking, his amusements, which were mostly solitary, were in general of a quiet if not bookish turn, and gave little stimulus to any other kind of mental acting than that which was already called forth by his studies. He consequently remained long, and in a less degree always remained, inexpert in everything requiring manual dexterity, and his mind as well as his hands did its work lamely, when it was applied to the practical details which are the chief interest of life to the majority of men. He was constantly meriting reproof by inattention, inobservance, and general slackness of mind in matters of daily life.

Beauchamp's "Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind" (papers of Bentham edited by Grote) was read by young Mill. This was an examination not of the truth, but of the usefulness of religion, and suited his mental condition well. His father had educated him from the first without any religious belief. The elder Mill, "finding no halting-place in Deism, had yielded to the conviction that nothing whatever can be known concerning the origin of things." He impressed upon his son from the first that the manner in which the universe came into existence was a matter on which nothing was or could be discovered; that the question, "Who made me?" cannot be answered, because we can have no experience from which to answer it; and that any answer only throws the difficulty a step further back, since the question immediately presents itself, "Who made God?" He assumed it to be impossible that a world so full of evil could be the production of a cause combining infinite power with perfect goodness. John Mill was thus, he says himself, "one of the very few examples in this country of one who has not thrown off religious belief, but who has never had any." He looked upon the modern exactly as he did upon the ancient religion, as something which in no way concerned him. If a philosopher has to comprehend what exists, it was unfortunate for Mr Mill, and unfavourable to the comprehensiveness of his philosophy, that he should have thus been trained to overlook Christianity, the greatest fact in European life.

Other than home influences now began to have play. In May 1829 his professional occupation was determined. He became a

subordinate in the India House under his father, who was resolved not to leave him to the uncertainty of the adventurous literary life. Steady official duties in Leadenhall Street occupied him in the thirty-five following years, at the end of which the East India Company was extinguished as a governing power. But his duties there always allowed him to have time enough for study.

He was now introduced gradually to a wider companionship. In the winter of 1822-23, he had formed the plan of a little society, composed of young men acknowledging Utility as the standard in ethical and political thought. At his suggestion it was called the Utilitarian Society. It was the first time that any one had taken the title of Utilitarian; but the term soon made its way into the English language. John Austin, William Ellis, John Arthur Roebuck, George Grote, and others, appear among his friends and associates.

He began about this time to show himself in print. His first published writings were two letters, which appeared in the end of 1822, in the "Traveller" newspaper, in defence of some opinion of Ricardo and his father in political economy. Early in the following year he published some letters in the "Morning Chronicle," in favour of complete freedom of religious discussion, in connection with the trial of Richard Carlile for blasphemy. During 1823 several of his writings appeared in the "Traveller" and "Morning Chronicle."

In April 1824 the "Westminster Review" was started, under the auspices of Jeremy Bentham, with John Bowring as editor. From that time till July 1828 Mr Mill was its most frequent contributor. He wrote thirteen articles in these years. One is especially worthy of note,—a review of Whately's "Logic," which appeared in January 1828, which it is interesting to compare with the modification and extension of the science proposed fifteen years afterwards in his own System. In 1827, at Bentham's request, his name was given to the world as editor of that philosopher's greatest treatise, the "Rationale of Evidence," the preface to which was written by Mr Mill: his previous publications were anonymous. This work, and the annotations, occupied much of his time for about a year. The connection of the subject with the form which logic afterwards took in his own hands is manifest.

In these years various influences helped to show that he had a nature too deep and human to be satisfied with the hard Benthamite creed in which he was trained. For some years after 1828 he wrote little, and nothing regularly, for publication. He congratulates himself on this. If he had gone on writing, it would have disturbed, he thinks, an important transformation in his opinions and character which was taking place about this time. For years his one object in life had been to be a reformer of society. He was now awakened from this as from a dream. All his happiness was to have been found in the steady pursuit of this end: the end, he found, had ceased to charm him, and he seemed to himself to have nothing left to live for. He was weighed down by melancholy. Part of the explanation probably was that his nerves were exhausted by an early life too purely intellectual. His condition so far reminds one of the account which David Hume gives of himself in the very curious letter to a physician, written at a corresponding period of life, and preserved among the papers in the possession of this Society, published by Mr Burton in his "Life of David Hume." It is interesting to compare Hume's story, in that letter, and Mr Mill's in his "Autobiography." The health of both seems to have been broken for the time by a too ardent application to abstract studies. The truth, however, was that Mill had discovered in some degree the narrowness of the theory of life on which his early training had been based. It had left him nothing worth living for. Mill, like Hume, gradually recovered, but with a more marked change in his mental tone and opinions afterwards than one finds in Hume. His early Utilitarianism was modified. While still convinced that happiness was the chief end of human life, he now, with doubtful consistency, thought that this was to be attained by not making it the direct end; and that those only are happy who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness—the philanthropic improvement of mankind, for instance. He found, too, that the emotions needed to be cultivated as well as the intellect. He began to feel the importance of poetry and art, especially music, as instruments of human culture. He was always very fond of music, and a scientific proficient.

The reading of Wordsworth for the first time, in the autumn of

1828, was an important event in Mr Mill's life. Beauty in nature had a power over him then that was a foundation for his taking pleasure in Wordsworth's poetry. He became a Wordsworthian, and contended on this side against Roebuck in a Debating Society. His sympathies were carrying him more and more away from Benthamism, and towards a deeper and truer philosophy of life. He was brought into friendly companionship with Frederick Maurice, and John Sterling, and other admirers of Coleridge. He became one of Coleridge's occasional visitors at Highgate, to whom I have heard that he was introduced by Sir Henry Taylor. After 1829 he withdrew from the Debating Society, and pursued his studies and meditations in private, endeavouring thus to adjust the relation of his new ideas and sympathies to his old opinions. Indeed, after this he seems to have lost his early fondness for Societies for discussion: a few years ago he declined to connect himself with the lately-founded Metaphysical Society of London, having the opinion that valuable results in subjects of abstract philosophy are best attained in solitary dialectic, or with a single interlocutor.

In the Society from which he withdrew, logical questions had been often discussed. About 1830 he began to put on paper thoughts on the theory of logic, and especially on the relations of induction to syllogism. Thus his own system of logic began to take shape. In political philosophy, too, he began to see that the truth was something more complex and many-sided than his early instruction had presupposed. This tendency was encouraged by a sympathetic study of the writings of the St Simonian school in France, and of the early works of Auguste Comte. Thomas Carlyle, too, had an effect upon him. He felt himself at an increasing distance from his father's whole tone of thought and feeling.

The year 1830, above all, was the commencement of what he considered the most valuable friendship of his life—that of Mrs Taylor, who, twenty years afterwards, became his wife, and whose influence over him, for good or evil, marked the whole remainder of his course.

About 1832 and the two or three following years of political excitement, he published writings in the "Examiner" and other

newspapers, and in the "Monthly Repository," which were more according to his matured judgment than his previous periodical essays.

His father died in June 1836. This seems to have freed him from some restraints and reticences. His friend Sir William Molesworth, a political and metaphysical thinker, had proposed to found a new Review, provided Mr Mill would agree to conduct it. In this way he was editor of the "London"—latterly the "London and Westminster—Review" in the years between 1835 and 1840. This Review was the organ which he then used for the spread of his opinions. It enabled him to express in print the results of his altered modes of thought, and to separate himself in a marked manner from the narrower Benthamism of his early writings. He resigned the editorship in 1840, after which he usually preferred for his essays the wider circulation of the "Edinburgh Review."

The first use Mr Mill made of the leisure gained by freedom from the cares of a brilliant editorship was to resume his "Logic." The preparation of this historically important treatise had occupied him at intervals for twelve years. In 1841 it was ready for the press, but circumstances delayed the publication till the spring of 1843. He now appeared for the first time as the author of a book, and of his greatest book—"A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive, being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation." It is the most elaborate treatise in the English language on the logical procedure in Induction. Since the publication of the "Novum Organum" and the "Essay on Human Understanding," no such comprehensive attempt in logical theory and the principles of the formation of knowledge had been made by an Englishman. Mr Mill had not forgotten his early studies in Aristotelian logic, which, in his correlation of induction and syllogism, he tried to assimilate with the methods of modern science. If we do not accept the result as satisfactory, we may at any rate allow that it has usefully called attention to the one-sidedness of merely formal logic. If he fails to show that all inference is ultimately from observed particulars to unobserved particulars, without any need for general notions, he has at least helped to prove the fruitlessness of merely verbal

sylogising, and to show the part which facts have in all our actual reasonings. It is as a logician probably that Mr Mill will be longest remembered in the history of English and European thought, and as having connected the revived logical studies of this country with the spirit and procedure of modern experimental science.

The same decade which gave birth to Mr Mill's "Logic" saw the first publication of the other great treatise of his life—next in importance to his "Logic." In 1848 his "Principles of Political Economy, with some of their Applications to Social Philosophy," were given to the world. Through this book he became to the nineteenth century in some degree what Adam Smith had been to the eighteenth by his "Wealth of Nations." It had been heralded in 1844 by "Five Essays on some Unsettled Questions in Economic Science." The "Political Economy" showed a return in some particulars from his previous extreme of reaction against his early Benthamism, along with a disposition to sceptical criticism of many of the presuppositions of the older school of political economists. His ideas of ultimate social improvement were becoming more revolutionary. His view of private property was becoming modified, and especially of the rights of individuals to land. Co-operation and Socialism began to take the place of Competition and Democracy in his thoughts.

The "System of Logic" and the "Principles of Political Economy" are the two books round one or the other of which almost all that Mr Mill has ever written may be said to circulate. The one describes his view of the intellectual means; the other is connected with the aim or end of the whole labour of his manhood. The logical employment of intellect for the improvement of society was in brief his life. Eight editions of the "Logic" have now been published; the "Political Economy," after passing through seven editions, was issued in a cheap form in 1865.

The ten years which followed the publication of the "Political Economy" formed a long pause in Mr Mill's course as an author. He was married to Mrs Taylor in April 1851, her former husband having died two years before. They lived in extreme seclusion for some years, withdrawn even from the society of his intimate friends, and under influences which tended again to confine his

sympathies. The silence was broken only by an occasional article in the "Edinburgh Review," or by replies to criticisms on one or other of his two great books.

Changes now occurred. In 1856 he was made Examiner of Indian Correspondence, and thus placed at the head of the office in the India House, in which he had served for thirty-three years. In the following year the Government of India was transferred from the Company to the Crown; after an unavailing remonstrance, drafted by Mr Mill, in the name of the Court of Directors, which was pronounced by Lord Grey the ablest State paper he had ever read. He afterwards declined an invitation by the present Lord Derby, then Indian Secretary, to form one of the newly-constituted Board of Indian Council.

Mr Mill had arranged to spend the winter of 1858-59—the first after his retirement from office—in the south of Europe. The death of his wife at Avignon, on their journey, frustrated his plans and hopes. The profound effect of this event upon his feelings is expressed in the most touching sentences he ever wrote, and to which there are few parallels in literature. It induced him to settle as near as possible to the place where she was buried. It thus became his habit to spend a great part of each year in his cottage at Avignon.

He soon reappeared as an author. His essay on "Liberty" was published in 1859. It had been planned and written as a short paper in 1854. It was in mounting the steps of the Capitol in the following year that the thought suggested itself of converting it into a volume. The essay is a vindication of the importance to society, and for the discovery of truth, of giving men full freedom to expand themselves in opposite and even conflicting directions, limited only by the prevention of injury to others. This little volume may be supposed to have had no inconsiderable effect in promoting that toleration for the free expression of opinion, even regarding beliefs longest revered, which, compared with the past, is a remarkable characteristic of this generation in Great Britain.

In the same year Mr Mill republished, in a collected form, in two volumes, under the title of "Dissertations and Discussions," articles formerly contributed to the "London," "London and West-

minster," and "Edinburgh" Reviews, as well as to other periodicals : a third volume followed in 1867. A pamphlet of "Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform" was also produced in 1859. In 1861 he published "Considerations on Representative Government."

In 1862 the essay on "Utilitarianism" appeared. It contains his latest view of ethical theory, and of the new criterion of morality which it was one great endeavour of his life to make known.

Mr Mill's principal contribution to analytical psychology and metaphysics was made in 1865. It took the form of an "Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy;" a large and elaborate volume, equal in scope and comprehensiveness to his greatest works. The "Examination" is a sort of philosophical supplement to his "Logic," in which many of the principles here argued had been silently assumed. Its tendency is to promote an explanation, through circumstances and association, of beliefs and feelings, which are apparently necessary and universal; in opposition to those who treat them as ultimate elements of human nature, and even as absolute or ontological necessities of reason. By Mr Mill this, like other questions, was not regarded as a mere matter of abstract speculation. Like his illustrious predecessor Locke, he thought he saw, in a prevailing tendency to consider some principles to be independent of the verification of experience, one of the most powerful obstructions to the efforts of the social reformer; and, like his predecessors on the same path, it may be thought that his theory makes science speculatively impossible for man. If rationality in nature is the basis of science, knowledge must presuppose reason in nature as the condition of its own existence; and then all ordinary inductive verification proceeds on the assumption of beliefs which do not admit themselves of being verified by observation.

This remarkable essay in metaphysics was followed by an essay in which he offers his final estimate of "Auguste Comte and Positivism."

After this productive literary period, Mr Mill was withdrawn for three years from his studious seclusion at Avignon. At the general election in 1865 he was chosen member for Westminster, and he appeared in the House of Commons when Parliament met in February 1866. In that and the two following sessions he was an

active and deeply interested member of the House of Commons—sessions of Parliament which passed the second Reform Bill. He spoke occasionally, and was heard with respect and curiosity, as the representative of large philosophical principles and a sort of philanthropic socialism. The advocacy of women's suffrage is that perhaps with which his Parliamentary name is most associated. In these years in England, he lived at Blackheath.

One result of the general election in November 1868 was to send Mr Mill back to his old pursuits, and to seclusion at Avignon. The Parliamentary episode had not indeed entirely interrupted his studies. In 1866 he read through Plato, as a preparation for a review of Grote. A fervid pamphlet in the same year, on "England and Ireland," urged a radical reform in the land system of the sister island. In 1867 he delivered an elaborate address on the Higher Education to the students of the University of St Andrews, who had chosen him as their Rector. He was also employed about a new edition of his father's "Analysis of the Human Mind," in conjunction with Mr Grote, Professor Bain, and our townsman Dr Findlater, which was published in 1869.

The years which followed Mr Mill's short Parliamentary career were mostly spent at Avignon, where he continued his life of literary labour. His essay on the "Subjection of Women" appeared in 1869, and this, with his efforts in Parliament, helped to make the education, and the political and social condition of the sex one of the questions of the day. His last published writing in philosophy of which I am aware was a review, in November 1871, of the Clarendon Press edition of Berkeley's works. He had always been a great admirer of Berkeley. In this essay he expresses the opinion that "of all who from the earliest times have applied the powers of their minds to metaphysical inquiries, Berkeley was the one of greatest philosophical genius; though among these are included Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Hartley, and Hume, as well as Des Cartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, and Kant." But it was the negative and analytic side of Berkeley that he admired; he had no appreciation of the constructive part of his doctrine, on which Berkeley himself lays most stress.

In March of last year, Mr Mill visited London, and lived for six weeks in a suite of rooms he had taken in Victoria Street,

Westminster. He spoke at a meeting on the land question, in support of his opinion with regard to "the unearned increment in the value of land." He had previously published "Chapters and Speeches on the Irish Land Question," followed by a "Programme of the Land Tenure Reform Association." During these weeks in London he mixed much in society. The writer of this Notice spent part of Mr Mill's last day in England with him in his rooms in Westminster, when he seemed full of physical and intellectual vigour, and indulged in youthful recollections of his father and of Bentham. Next day, the 18th of April, he returned to Avignon. On Saturday the 3d of May, he made a long botanising excursion in that neighbourhood. Botanical research had been an enthusiasm of his life, and his original collection of herbaria is, I believe, of great value. He caught a chill on his way home. It issued in a severe form of erysipelas, of which he died on the morning of the following Thursday. He was buried the day after beside his wife. The Protestant pastor, the physician, and his domestic servant, formed the small company of mourners who saw him laid in his grave.

Mr Mill's appearances in public in his later years, aided by the art of the photographer, have made his earnest, thoughtful face, with its sensitive, nervous action, familiar to many. A refined, delicate organism, and wiry form, suggested the moderately good health which, notwithstanding extraordinary intellectual labour he enjoyed through life. He was fond of walking; allured by his love of botany and his passion for rural nature. He was a great reader of all sorts of current and periodical literature. His conversation, like his books, was remarkable for its abundance of logically digested information, judicially deliberate, distinct, and everywhere vivified by the presence of active intelligence. He showed little or no appreciation of humour, but both his spoken and written words revealed a subdued and grave emotional fervour, especially for the propagation of opinions in which he believed, and the promotion of social changes which he supposed to be advantageous.

Probably no contemporary has modified more than Mr Mill the tone and manner of thinking of the fairly-educated community in Great Britain. The time is hardly come, however, for a satisfac-

tory estimate of what he has done, what he has failed to do, and what his influence in the future is likely to be. The habit of thinking characteristic of this generation is too much affected by his logical methods, and pervaded by his spirit, to admit of a perfectly just estimate.

That he has been in a great degree the representative English thinker of his generation will be generally allowed; for we already see enough to recognise in him the leader in this age of that school of British philosophy, which, in the seventeenth century, was represented by Hobbes and Locke, and in last century by Hartley and Hume. If he wanted the rugged masculine vigour and originality of Hobbes, he had more ardent sympathies and a more indulgent candour. Locke undoubtedly far excelled him in massive common sense and in practical knowledge of human nature, and was more complete as a man; but he was hardly superior as a subtle analytical psychologist, or equal as a lucid expositor. If Mr Mill wanted Hume's grace, humour, gaiety of temper, and insight, in the expression of a philosophy of life in a large degree common to them both, he had a moral earnestness and intensity of sentiment which one does not find in Hume. Mill was eminently a logician rather than a metaphysician or a speculative moralist; his conception of life was limited in its scope and aim. He methodised the experience of an age devoted to the physical sciences, and tending towards materialism. He was not a speculative philosopher, who sought to comprehend the universe: he was a reformer who wanted to make society better, by improving its relations to its circumstances on this planet. He accordingly explained to his countrymen their own scientific habits of research, in which inductive methods and presuppositions are employed with extraordinary vigour and success, for the improvement of circumstances and of the external arrangements of society. As a metaphysician, he always tried to keep speculation within the limits of positive science, and to dissolve by analysis, as hurtful prejudices, the faith or thought which does not admit of ordinary inductive verification,—thus, it may be alleged, overlooking in man, and withdrawing from human life, some of their best and noblest possessions.

Yet in some of their aspects Mr Mill's life and writings witness to a broader and deeper philosophy than he professed. His heart and his

sympathies outgrew the adverse influences of a sunless childhood. And his doctrines in metaphysics and ethics sometimes, I think, unconsciously recognise principles which break the logical symmetry of his professed Utilitarianism and philosophy of Custom and Association, producing, as in the case of Locke and others, an ambiguity in the exposition of his most important conclusions. As Sir James Mackintosh suggests of David Hume, it would indeed be a matter of wonder if his esteem for moral excellence should not at least have led him to envy those who are able to contemplate the perfection of excellence in the Supreme Reason that is accepted by them as the support of their lives, and the all-reconciling unity of existence.

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